

Founders' Day 2021

October 11, 2021

President's Word

In the years prior to 1955, many values and dreams interfaced across the continents and landed here on Mexique Street.

- Schools here, mainly the Armenian ones needed well-trained teachers and institutions needed new leaders. The Armenian Evangelical Church, true to its heritage, owned the dream and the project, and needed its higher education experience to also be realized in Beirut.
- Cosmopolitan Beirut was a bustling city in a country of culture, business, creativity, education, religious and ethnic coexistence and dialogue.
- The Armenian Missionary Association of America, founded in NY in 1918, had gathered around it many survivors of the Genocide who

had made new lives in America hoping to rebuild the communities of their compatriots in the lands where were longing to build their lives on solid foundations.

- Benevolent business people like Stephen Mehagian in Phoenix, AZ and Stephen Philibosian in Philadelphia, originally from Hadjin, and migrants before the Adana massacres of 1909, had the dream of equipping their people with standards and institutions of higher education.

And Haigazian was born on October 17, 1955 here in this location and opened its doors to all sectors of society, especially those who would not have the means to get higher education elsewhere, with the standards and values that would make one advance in a healthy and constructive manner.

It is our custom on Founders Day to not simply count achievements and successes, but rather reiterate our values that make Haigazian University what it is and what it aspires to be.

What brought the founders together was not the need for fame, financial gain, political clout, educational market competition, and not free enterprise.

The dream was for every new generation to stand on the upright values of the highest standards of life and not simply of advanced academic learning. The dream was for each new generation surpass the former ones with intellectual, ethical and professional standards.

In fact, if there is nothing one will learn at Haigazian, one should at least learn that a degree is a good body in need of a soul. Oh, how many times did we remember in the past two years in Lebanon that our lack is not for degree holders but for good, transparent, honest and upright

human beings who also have good degrees. How many times did we remember that formal education is only one component that one needs.

Now, in the Land of the Cedars, we ask, what values do we transmit and what example do we give to the next generation? What lessons did we learn from our founders as well?

Stand up again after any breakdown or calamity. But stand on what foundation? With what support? With what ethics? Others can help and should help, but our discipline, our strong value system, our hard work, our selflessness, our learning curve, the good example we can set for others, as well as our service orientation are keys to good living and virtuous societies.

How can I say this more simply on this day of celebration?

Let me divide people into two types: those who are oriented to live for themselves with a motto that says, “**Catch me in my greed if you can**”. And a second type that learns to live with others with a motto that says, “**Help me live up to highest life-giving standards I can find.**”

In a document called the **Heidelberg Catechism** (1563, Germany) there is a term, rooted in scriptures that says YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN. In its public manifestation it means, life is not my property, my job is not my property, my position, my relationships and duties are not my property to use or abuse as I wish, no matter how high my position.

When we confuse dignity with vanity, freedom with negligence, and position with privilege, then we act as if we are the owners of all, and we spoil it all.

Things, responsibilities, relationships are not valuable because we own them, but because we honor them.

On Founders' day, we focus on values not undertakings. For it is more important to graduate students who have a sense of value and be respected and responsible citizens, than to move up in the ladder of fame and abuse their positions in life and society. In the 21st century this may sound idealistic. We really hope each student will be a leader, an accomplished professional, and a person of high impact. But we hope to put dignity, honor and truth first and other levels of success will follow.

Now, with those thoughts, and in such a time as this is Lebanon, I am so honored to have with us a special personality who also has a critical message for us at Haigazian University and much beyond Haigazian.

The United Nations Secretary-General appointed Ms. Joanna Wronecka of Poland as his new Special Coordinator for Lebanon, in April 2021.

Ms. Wronecka brings over 25 years of experience in diplomacy, international security and Middle East affairs, serving as the Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations (2017-2021), including during Poland's membership in the Security Council (2018-2019), and as Under Secretary of State for Arab and African countries, development cooperation and Polish-United Nations relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland (2015-2017).

She previously served as Head of the European Union Delegation to Jordan (2011-2015), Ambassador of Poland to Morocco and Egypt as well as non-resident Ambassador of Poland to Mauritania and Sudan. Ms. Wronecka further served as the Director of the Secretariat of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland. Director of the Africa and Middle East

Department and Deputy Director of the United Nations Department at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1996-1998).

She holds a Ph.D. in Arabic philosophy and a master's degree in Arabic philology from the University of Warsaw and conducted research on Middle East and Islamic affairs at the Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation Economique et Juridique in Cairo and at the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Your Excellency, the floor is yours.

PH